

**Department of Justice  
U.S. Attorney's Office  
Southern District of West Virginia**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**MASSIVE SHOPLIFTING SCHEME TARGETING MAJOR RETAIL  
STORES SHUT DOWN**

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- United States Attorney Mike Stuart announced a major takedown today of a fraudulent fencing scheme in the Charleston, West Virginia area. In a criminal complaint unsealed today in United States District for the Southern District of West Virginia, a Cross Lanes, West Virginia man, Nedeltcho Vladimirov, a native of Bulgaria, was arrested and charged with money laundering. The complaint alleges that Vladimirov operated a fraudulent fencing scheme for several years. A fencing operation is one in which stolen goods are acquired in order to later resell them for profit.

“The scale of this shoplifting scheme is extraordinary. Nearly 4,000 items and nearly \$400,000 in goods were stolen from retailers like Target, CVS and Kroger in approximately two years. We believe that Vladimirov received over \$200,000 from selling the stolen goods in just a single year. Like many consumers, I shop at Kroger, CVS and Target. The volume of theft is almost unbelievable,” said United States Attorney Mike Stuart. “Victims. Lots and lots of victims. Consumers. Insurers. Taxpayers. Even the shoplifters. Consumers pay a heavy toll for shoplifting schemes like this whether through higher prices for consumer goods or the loss of profitability and jobs by the retailers themselves. Additionally, one of the great tragedies in this scheme is that it fed the need for instant money by many shoplifters who were feeding their exhaustive search for drug cash. Schemes like this only serve to further and advance the crisis of addiction in our communities.”

“The U.S. Secret Service Charleston, West Virginia Resident Office, has successfully partnered with our local and state law enforcement partners along with corporate security from Target, Kroger and CVS,” said United States Secret Service Resident Agent in Charge Wade Fleming. This led to the arrest of Nedeltcho Vladimirov who victimized national retail merchants and took advantage of West Virginians to commit retail theft for his own enrichment. These partnerships are the best way to limit victimization of West Virginians.”

The charges and arrest result from an investigation by the United States Secret Service, the West Virginia State Police, Bureau of Criminal Investigations, the Putnam County Sheriff's Department, the Kanawha County Sheriff's Department and the South Charleston Police Department, together with Organized Retail Crimes (ORC) investigators from Kroger, CVS Pharmacy, and Target Corporation, with assistance from eBay, Inc.. The investigation began after ORC investigators apprehended shoplifters at several stores in the South Charleston area. The complaint alleges that the shoplifters (known as “boosters”) were acting at the direction of Vladimirov, who would purchase the items from boosters with cash at a fraction of the retail value and would then sell the stolen items

at a profit on the internet. Law enforcement used several investigative tools, including surveillance and undercover operations, to reveal the full scope of the illegal operation. Records obtained by investigators show that a user account believed to be associated with Vladimirov sold at least 3,676 items for a total of \$369,818.62 from late 2017 to late 2019 and it is believed that the stolen goods generated over \$200,000 in sales from January 2019 to January 2020.

Stuart was outspoken in his recognition of law enforcement efforts in the matter, “I want to commend the excellent work of many investigative agencies -- the U.S. Secret Service, the West Virginia State Police, the Kanawha and Putnam County Sheriff’s Departments and the South Charleston Police Department- for their work in shutting down this long-term scheme. My team did an excellent job including investigator Steve Rowley and Assistant United States Attorney Andrew Tessman. I also want to particularly thank the ORC investigators from Kroger, CVS Pharmacy, and Target Corporation as well as eBay for its assistance in shutting down this scheme. Public and private partnerships in investigations is a bit unusual but their assistance and partnership in this matter was critical. Hopefully this matter sends a strong message to shoplifters to “knock it off, get a job, and if shoplifting is how you feed your addiction, get help and do it today.” It also sends a message to retailers that “we have your back” and that “we can no longer look the other way.”

The investigation was a collaborative effort between federal, state and local, and private retail law enforcement partners. Today’s actions would not have been possible without the seamless collaboration of each of these partners. The investigation is ongoing and could result in additional federal and state charges in the future.

Assistant United States Attorney Andrew J. Tessman is handling the matter.

Please Note: A criminal complaint is merely an allegation and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.